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## AGRICULTURAL LABORERS IN THE UNITED STATES

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The Census of 1900 is authority for the statement that the number of persons engaged in agriculture was, at that time, slightly more than 10,000,000. Since the number of farms in 1900 was reported to be 5,740,000, it is clear that the number of agricultural laborers was less than two per farm. In order to understand what is meant by "agricultural laborers" it might be noted that this included all persons ten years of age and over employed in agriculture. If we subtract the total number of regular resident farmers from the number of persons engaged in agriculture we have remaining slightly more than 4,500,000 persons. This includes members of farmers' families in addition to hired laborers.

The Census of 1900 further shows that the average laborer's income, for each person engaged in agriculture, slightly exceeded \$288 in the United States as a whole. Since the amount expended for hired labor by all resident farmers in the United States in 1899 was nearly \$355,000,000, it is clear that there must have been at least 1,231,000 hired laborers and the number probably equaled 1,500,000 or more, inasmuch as many of these laborers were not employed for the entire year. Further study brings us to the conclusion that probably 3,000,000 of the persons engaged in agriculture referred to are members of the farmers' families.

Without this analysis, and it should be greatly enlarged upon, it is practically impossible to give any intelligent report concerning the status of agricultural laborers in the United States, and even with this brief statement it is very difficult to summarize the question satisfactorily. We may say, however, in a general way that there were slightly less than 6,000,000 resident farmers. Of course we are safe in concluding that practically all of these live in some kind of a farm home, and, therefore, we may say, that at that time, there were nearly 6,000,000 farm homes. Some of these may have been in small towns and villages. We may also conclude that in addition to the heads of the families there were some 3,000,000 mem-

bers of the families over ten years of age who worked for their living on the farms. This doubtless represents quite closely the number of grown sons who had remained on the farm and who had not yet established separate farm homes. We may safely conclude that this 3,000,000 lived in the homes of their parents, and, therefore, probably nearly 9,000,000 of the persons gainfully employed in agriculture lived in homes in the open country. This leaves probably less than 1,500,000 hired laborers who very largely move from farm to farm seeking employment where they may. It is also doubtless true that many of these same transient laborers secure employment during a considerable part of the year in cities and villages as well as in lumber camps, on railroads, etc.

It would not be quite correct to conclude from this general survey that nearly 9,000,000 of the persons engaged in agriculture represent the unchanging farm laborer class, and that the 1,500,000 represent the transient employees, because as a matter of fact there is a very large amount of changing constantly going on among the 9,000,000. It should be noted in passing that more than 2,000,000 of the less than 6,000,000 farms—that is to say more than thirty-five per cent of all the farms—were operated by tenants. Even allowing for a very small change among the owners and managers, it is probable that not less than 1,000,000 farmers change their residence each year. We have, therefore, probably 2,500,000 more or less transient persons engaged in agriculture; this can easily be expanded to 3,000,000 persons when we include the grown sons of the farmers who have changed their residence. It is none the less true, however, that there were nearly 6,000,000 country homes to be occupied.

If we turn now to the Census of 1910 we find that the number of farms has increased to nearly 6,400,000, and we may assume that the number of farm homes has increased accordingly. We may also assume, although the reports are not yet available, that the number of persons gainfully employed in agriculture has increased at much the same ratio. Unless there has been a decrease in the birth rate, the number of members of the farmers' families, who have remained on the farm, probably has kept pace with the increase in the number of farms. During the last decade there has been a considerable increase in the number of farms operated by tenants—the number now being more than 2,350,000. At the present time thirty-seven per cent are operated by tenants. This doubtless means that the

percentage of farmers who may be classed among transients has increased materially during the decade.

The Census of 1900 did not tell how many resident farmers employed hired labor; the estimate made (1,500,000) was doubtless far too low, since it was based upon the theory that most of those employed were employed for the greater part of the year. The Census of 1910 gives information which was not available ten years earlier. According to the present Census almost 3,000,000 resident farmers employed transient laborers during the year 1909—in other words, forty-six out of each one hundred farmers employed transient laborers. It would appear from this that, unless the same transient laborers were employed by different farmers at different seasons of the year, there are available approximately 3,000,000 transient farm laborers. If there are this many transient farm laborers, we can readily see that the number of persons gainfully employed who are more or less transient, including tenants and owners who move during an average year, must be not far from 5,000,000.

Passing now from the volume of farm laborers to a consideration of other problems, it must be clear that with so many farm laborers moving constantly from place to place there is the best possible opportunity for competition. Not only is there opportunity for competition among these persons for places on farms, but there is a very good opportunity for these same persons to secure employment in cities, lumber camps, and other places. There is also the best possible opportunity for these men to familiarize themselves with conditions in different parts of the country, and make that section where they secure the best treatment their home. In this way treatment may be equalized more or less in different parts of the country.

Probably the best possible opportunity which comes to these men is the opportunity to study methods of conducting agricultural operations in different parts of the country. As a result of this study and as a result of their serving more or less in the capacity of apprentices, at the same time receiving good wages, this class, numbering 5,000,000 or nearly that many, is in a position to become owners of farms. It is a fact that agricultural laborers can change to the status of tenants in some parts of the country with little or no effort, merely by expressing their desire to change. In some sections

of the country, notably parts of the South, the status of the hired laborer does not greatly differ from that of some classes of tenants. The average income probably does not vary greatly, and in some sections the hired laborer who has a family is furnished with as satisfactory a home as is the farm tenant who comes without equipment and must be constantly directed in his work. Not only are these hired laborers, who represent the more transient element of our agricultural population, eligible to the position of tenants and managers, they may even yet with considerable ease become owners of small tracts of land in various parts of the country, or they may take up claims of different kinds or in many other ways establish themselves as farm owners. There is doubtless still a very good opportunity for farm laborers who work for a wage to become tenants, owners, or managers of farms.

It would be impossible in such a brief treatment of the subject as I have attempted here to compare the relative status of farm laborers in different parts of the United States, or to compare the relative income. Suffice it to say that in practically all sections of the country the farm laborer, who is not a member of the family and who is hired for a definite wage, is furnished with board and a place to live. The Census of 1910 shows that twenty per cent of the total amount reported as expended for hired labor during the year 1909 was in the form of rent and board, only eighty per cent being in the form of cash. In some sections of the country small separate buildings are furnished to the hired laborers who have families. In some sections separate buildings are furnished for all hired employees. This, however, is only possible on the large farms or plantations, where separate quarters are sometimes maintained and is a very small part of the total.

The reports show that not only do forty-six out of every one hundred resident farmers employ labor, but also that the average expenditure per farm, including the value of rent and board furnished, is less than \$225. From this we are safe in concluding, even if we do not know the facts, that the customary thing on approximately half of the farms in the United States is for the resident farmer to employ from one to four or five persons for a comparatively short period of time during the busy season of the year. It is impracticable to furnish a separate house or building for these hired laborers, and, therefore, the common thing is for

the hired laborers to be assigned rooms in the family residence or sleeping quarters in some of the stables or hay barns. At the same time it is very customary for the hired laborers to sit at the table for meals with members of the family unless the number is large enough to warrant setting the table twice. Where only one or two laborers are employed, it is almost a universal practice for these one or two laborers to live in the homes with the resident farmers.